



Testimony in Support of S.B 284, AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS.

Dear Chairs Abercrombie and Moore, Vice Chairs Lesser and Leeper, Ranking Members Berthel and Case, and Members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Pia Baldwin Edwards, and I am a resident of New Haven. I'm writing to communicate my strong support for **S.B. 284 - An Act Increasing the Age from Eight to Eighteen Years for an Income-Eligible Person to Obtain Medical Assistance Regardless of Immigration Status**. This bill would provide state-funded medical assistance to any child or young adult under the age of eighteen years of age, regardless of immigration status, whose household income does not exceed two hundred one percent of the federal poverty level, and who does not otherwise qualify for Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance 11 Program, or employer-sponsored insurance.

Connecticut's expansion of HUSKY last year to children ages 0-8 years was an important win for immigrants in the state, who have been predominantly challenged by the shortage of healthcare resources available to them. The passage of S.B 284 would expand this win by guaranteeing more access to programs like HUSKY that largely benefit low-income immigrant families and individuals. Undocumented immigrants without coverage must rely on health care safety net resources, such as public hospitals or community clinics, to access needed medical care. Despite serving as important access points, none of these resources is equivalent to having comprehensive health insurance coverage.

Data reported by the Migrant Policy Institute (MPI) estimates 30.1% of foreign-born, non-citizens in Connecticut have no health care coverage, an estimated 159,600 individuals. In the undocumented community, that number goes up to an estimated 52% uninsured rate, or 53,000 uninsured undocumented individuals. Connecticut must recognize this staggering gap in equity if it hopes to lower the state's overall uninsured rate, especially during a pandemic that is impacting immigrants disproportionately. While the uninsured rate in Connecticut is roughly 5.9%, an estimated 52% of undocumented immigrants in our state are uninsured. Connecticut's HUSKY Health Programs restricts applicants eligibility based on immigration status. Currently,

undocumented individuals (those who are not US citizens or greencard holders) and those who have held a greencard for less than 5 years are unable to qualify for HUSKY.

According to the Hasting Center, states and local governments use their own funds to offer coverage to undocumented children when federal funds can't offer coverage to undocumented children. For example, the Healthy Kids program in San Francisco covers uninsured children under the age of 19, including undocumented children. Similarly, the All Kids program Illinois covers all children under the age of 19 who meet program income requirements, regardless of immigration status. California policymakers have chosen to expand full-scope Medi-Cal to children and young adults regardless of their immigration status if they are income-eligible. Undocumented children under 19 became eligible for Medi-Cal if their family incomes were below 266 percent of FPL starting in May 2016. The expansion enrolled approximately 120,000 individuals as of June 2020.

Providing preventative and stable health coverage has been shown to reduce healthcare costs and save money by insuring individuals and allowing them to receive preventative care and treat issues earlier on. Early treatment effectively reduces the amount an individual will pay for healthcare in the long term by preventing health issues from developing further and worsening. Research shows that having insurance makes a difference in whether and when people access needed care. Those who are uninsured often delay or go without needed care, which can lead to worse health outcomes over the long-term that may ultimately be more complex and expensive to treat.

Undocumented immigrants in our state pay roughly 145 million dollars into state and local taxes every year, 253 million into federal taxes, out of that 54.6 million goes into medicare and 207.4 million goes into social security according to a study conducted by the New American Economy. Undocumented taxpayers are contributing to the state's health programs, but their status makes them ineligible to access said state health programs.

Connecticut's undocumented immigrant population has recounted stories of being turned away for lifesaving treatments and preventive services, encountering discrimination and racism while seeking health care, and fear of being arrested while trying to get help. This is highly unjust given that they pay millions of dollars in local and state taxes every year to fund the health coverage programs that they're excluded from. The Affordable Care Act made huge strides in increasing access to health insurance, but it excluded undocumented immigrants from its programs. Undocumented individuals in our state are effectively cut off from access to reliable health care. HUSKY, Connecticut's Medicaid program, provides a safety net by offering health insurance to most low-income residents, but it currently excludes undocumented immigrants and green card holders who have been in the country for less than five years.

In conclusion, I urge you to expand healthcare to the immigrant population because it would allow them to receive the preventative treatment they deserve, reduce the uninsured rate in Connecticut, and save the state money by decreasing uncompensated care costs. Connecticut can and should do better in promoting healthcare as a human right, rather than a commodity that only the wealthy can afford. I urge you to favorably vote this bill out of the Human Services Committee so that more immigrants in the state are able to access and afford health care that they're in desperate need of.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Pia Baldwin Edwards
New Haven, CT